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BEAVER LODGE VALLEY THEATRE OF FIRST CONSIDERABLE SETTLEMENT

Although a trickle of traders, trappers ranchers and croppers had scattered sporadically over the Grande Prairie and although a mixed-blood population seems to have localized at an early date around Flying Shot, the first considerable number of landseekers established themselves along the Beaver Lodge river, in a valley whose fame had been sung abroad and which still captivates all who view its mountain-fringed basin from the rolling foothills of Saskatoon Mountain or from the nearer ridge on which the Sub-Station is situate. If we except Henry Patterson, who first squatted by a spring along the lower trail, but now lives out towards Goodfare, the Valley's first permanent settler was Wm. N. Bernard, Minnesota-born and Dakota-raised but recently living in Portland, Oregon. After a rapid scouting trip in the summer of 1907 up as far as the Natinaw Hill (the vantage point on the old Spirit River trail overlooking the Grande Prairie district), he was impressed with the country, and, as he remembers his experiences, hurried back to Edmonton, bought a team and wagon, returned to the Grande Prairie district that same autumn and after looking the lake district over squatted along the Beaver Lodge on N.E. 13, 71-10-W6th but after the survey in 1909 moved his buildings over to S.E. 24-71-10. After putting up his buildings that autumn he returned to Portland, Oregon, to which he subsequently made three other trips but has since 1914 lived steadily at

Beaver Lodge. His first breaking was done for him by Henry Patterson in 1908, five acres on each of the two places, S.E. 24-71-10 and N.W. 18-71-9. His first crop was seeded in 1909 with oats purchased from Bill Smith, at $1.50 per bushel. The oats were sown by hand and dragged in with brush.

The natives told Bernard that before he came in there had been a big fire coming from Pouce Coupe and sweeping down to the Smoky, burning up the sod. Even then there was much less clear prairiei than now. In 1908 he himself set a fire that burned for two or three days. Wm. Grant recalls a great fire in August, 1906, but knows nothing of the earlier one.

Jack Harding, a Texan rancher, who is said to have kept a stopping place near Eggie's, on the Athabasca trail, squatted near Bernard in 1808 but moved over to Twin Lakes at Clairmont and later to Pouce Coupe. He brought in some fifteen cattle, including a bull which had nearly capsized the ferry at Peace River.

The next permanent settlers in the neighborhood were the Stones and O.H. Johnson. After a reconnoitering trip in the autumn of 1907, the late Rede and Robert Stone (cousins) brought their families up from Sawridge, at the east end of Lesser Slave Lake, in the spring of 1908, accompanied by the late O.H. Johnson, who after spending a summer in the dist-rict brought his family in the spring of 1909 accompanied by

his son-in-law, C.O. Pool. During the summer Mr. Johnson raised quite a crop of turnips and in the fall gave turnips to the Indians, earning the sobriquet "Rutabaga" Johnson. Another Johnson in the neighborhood at a later date was called "Armstrong" Johnson because he cut hay with a scythe.

Rede Stone built in a picturesque spruce-backed site along the Beaver Lodge river on what proved to be the fractional part of N.E. 33-71-10-W 6th. The camp had been pitched there and both Rede Stone and Johnson chose it so they tossed.

Johnson then went up the river but finding his choice frosty selected another location on a hill now called "Stoney Point," just northwest of the present town of Beaver Lodge. He had had enough experience of dry countries and was bound to have water.

Robert Stone settled down the river from Rede on S.W. 35-71-10. Close beside his house was an old dug-out once occupied by Dave Sexsmith, who was the first man to bring a wheeled vehicle into the Grande Prairie district and the man after whom Sexsmith was named. This dugout was used by Robt. Stone as a cellar. It was possibly the same one once occupied by Jim Brooks, Tom Lilack and Bob Potts, all interesting characters of the early days and all but Lilack still living so far as the writer is aware. Mention of early days takes us back to the "Scurvy Camp" of 1898-99, w ere the late Geo. McLeod, ex-sheriff of Peace River and Jim Brooks held rendezvous near the old crossing since called "the Lower Crossing."

According to an interview obtained from Mr. McLeod in 1922, he and Brooks, with a partner each, had come up in the van of the Klondike rush and decided to prospect along the headwaters of the Smoky. Whipsawing lumber they made themselves a good camp on the Beaver Lodge and during the winter were surprised to find their trap lines cut by trails. Following these up they would find two or three Klondikers huddled in a little log shack around a sheet-iron stove and all attacked by scurvy. One group after another was rounded up until a dozen were gathered in. One died and another should have but was too stubborn. He was so obstinate that if they made a little squirrel soup and offered it to him he wouldn't take it but if they set it beside him when asleep he would wake up and do so. For weeks he never had a movement of the bowels, yet when finally the party was taken out where vegetables were available all recovered and McLeod afterwards saw his stubborn patient on the trap line apparently well as ever.

Dave Sexsmith was a member of the party and recalls the experience with horror.

One would like to tell more of the early days, for instance of how Bill and Stewart English, Bob Potts et al wintered in 1898-99 across the Wapiti south of where Grande Prairie now stands, living after New Year's on horse meat then on muskrats and finally on fish, but this is not agriculture and the Editor indulgence has limits.

To return to agricultural settlement on the Beaver Lodge the Stones brought garden seeds from Edmonton. Seed oats were purchased by them from English and Calkin, at Spirit River, on the way in. Marquis wheat was later brought in from Edmonton but froze. Fall wheat was then tried, says George Stone, but mostly winterkilled. On their comparatively level land little wheat was grown by them for years. It did better on higher land in the neighborhood. Of the Stone family the only survivors in the district are Rede's stepson, George, and his wife, who was Robert Stone's daughter Inez. One of Rede's stepsons had died at Tom Sinclair's on arrival on the prairie, Percy and Rede Jr., followed, then the elders. But they and the Johnson family filled a large place and left an honored name in the country. The Johnson family of 1909 had included Mr. and Mrs. C.O. Pool and their six-months child Ralph; Arnold Johnson, wife and two eldest children, Percy and Muriel; Ruth and Anna Johnson, afterwards Mrs. Ralph and Harry Carrell, respectively; Johnny and Pauline Johnson. Accompanying the party was Henry Roper. Mr. O.H. Johnson died in the Edmonton hospital in 1916 following an operation.

On August 26, 1907, W.G. (Billy) Johnson, Dick Brinkman, Wm. McLachlan and Bob Steele arrived at Dunvegan. That fall they cut out the new road from Spirit River south to what was then known as the Beaver Dams, north of where Sexsmith now is. Johnson, Jim Dodge and Bob Steele came to the Beaver Lodge in 1908, erecting on the S.E. of 18 the four walls of a house intended for Jimmie Dodge, though he never came

back to occupy it. Immediately across the Beaver Lodge from where Wm. McNeil's house now stands they put up the walls of a house for Steele. Johnson got out a set of logs down the river but never laid them up. Johnson and Steele both squatted along the river, but Johnson eventually homesteaded in 1909 on N.E. 35-71-10, the land on a corner of which the old Beaver Lodge log school (the first public school building on the prairie if not in the Peace) was built. Steele chose a nice open quarter along the river below Robt. Stone's, on the area where Johnson had first squatted.

Other early squatters in the neighborhood were a man named McBride, Anton Dahl and his two sons (Ben and Elmer) Ivan Abricosovich, locally called "Abricosy" a Russian, and Harry Raynes, an Englishman. Then there were the late Ed. Carlson, a Swede, and S.M. "Jim" Beuman, originally hailing from Waterloo Co., Ont. East of Camp Creek each of these two homesteaded a quarter with a spring. Each was supposed to command a half interest in 35 cents and Carlson claimed it was really his capital. Bauman was the first man in the district to get his quarter all broken.

For a long time all the prairie west of Beaver Lodge was locally called "the Red Willow district." In it the first white settlers seem to have been Billy and Adam Dorin and Jim Cory, who came, Bernard says, in 1908. The Dorin's built a house on the Grigg place but after the survey let that go and went up on the hill. Adam took the place where Billy Perdue now lives. Billy took the Dimsky place and Cory

settled down near the coal mine, where Gaunt homesteaded, but left it after the survey and filed on the present site of Halcourt. The late Bob Shaw settled adjacent to Cory. Henry Roper went over to Halcourt neighborhood about 1909. Sam McNaught and Harry Walker settled there about 1910. Walker was a tinsmith by trade and one of the few South African veterans to prove up the script issued to him.

The year 1909 saw the arrival of the famous company of Ontarions called the "Bull Outfit" so called because they left Edmonton with eighteen teams of oxen. The majority though not all, belonged to one religious group. Their object was to find a place in the West where a considerable block of land could be had on which to locate not only homesteads but the South African scripts with which the majority had provided themselves. Adequate areas being hard to find nearer the railroads, attention finally focussed on the Peace and quite definitely upon the Beaver Lodge valley. Secretary and business leader of the enterprise was the late I.E. Gaudin, who with the late C.A. Drake had been engaged in business life in the West but they and their wives decided to throw in their lot with the company of farmers, young men and others from Ontario. E.A. Smith was elected as the trail boss. Besides these three men the personnel comprised:

Mrs. Drake (now Mrs. J.W. Wilkie), Mrs. E.A. Smith; Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Crabbe, their son-in-law J.M. Miller, with wife and four children (Albert, Fred, Mary and Cliff);

Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Lossing and son Clarence; Mr. and Mrs. Amos Sherk, with family (Gordon, Marley, Maud and Lulu), R. Shisler and wife; S.C. McNaught; Sam Sarjeant; Don Cranston; Garnet Truax; Wm. Pierce, George and Victor Flint.

By the way, Flints, Stones and Steele gave the Beaver Lodge neighborhood a "hard" name from the punster's standpoint.

Another coincidence in names was that two unrelated men named Crabbe, hailing from quite different parts, homesteaded side by side. Wm. Crabbe came in with the "Bull Outfit"; John Crabbe drove in a pair of black and white cows and was distinquished as "Cow Crabbe."

Leaving Edmonton on April 20, 1909, with fourteen loaded wagons, a caboose, and three spare wagons the party crossed the Athabasca River at "the Landing" on May 1, after a night of eight below zero, and after stopping along the Little Slave River to cut 108 cords of steamboat wood to pay for transport of the freight up Lesser Slave Lake, and then cutting another hundred cords at Shaw's Point near the head of the lake (this after the oxen with empty wagons had been driven along the rocky north shore making a record trip and beating the steamboat to Shaw's Point), they finally proceeded by way of Peace River Crossing, Dunvegan and Spirit River, completing the 550-mile trip to Beaver Lodge on July 14, having been near three months en route.

"One day at a time" the motto, they had plodded along, tortoislike, negotiating hills, river and muskegs, fighting mosquitoes and flies, rationing food supplies for a while

to make them hold out and finally winning through by co-operation.

Land was roughly divided by the wagon-wheel method, the party squatted, put up hay, broke a little land on which to sow the winter wheat threshed out by the boys from Mead and Grant's 1908 stacks, and then sent a party back to Peace River for flour ground at the Catholic Mission at Shaftesbusy Settlement. The district was surveyed by Walter McFarlane late that summer and script entries accordingly made.

Out of the company of 31 persons, eight of the young people (only two of whom belonged to families in the group) have since returned to urban occupations. Five who remained have passed to their long rest, viz., Mr. Drake, Mr. Gaudin, Mrs. and Mr. Crabbe and quite recently Mrs. Lossing. The other eighteen survivors remain in the Beaver Lodge, Huallen and Halcourt neighborhoods, and all but one are engaged at least partly in agricultural pursuits. It is probably one of the best percentage examples on record of successful pioneer settlement. They came with a purpose and most of them stuck to their aim. Ascertain why a settler goes to a new country and you can predict with fair probability whether he will stay. This applies likewise to the Stones, Johnsons, Pooles and other early settlers on the Beaver Lodge.

In the following year the colony was augmented by Mrs. S. C. McNaught and children (Crosby and Mary), Mr. and Mrs. P. Flint and daughter Effie, Mr. and Mrs. John Walton and children (Irene, Arthur, Jim, Jessie, Nellie, Louise and Kathleen), Wesley Pierce, his siter and her husband

(Mrs. and Mr. Robinson, respectively), Thos. Kennedy and son Jim, Howard, Henry and Mrs. I.E. Gaudin with infant son D'Arcy. Seven of these twenty-three left the district. Mr. Walton died at his home in the Lower Beaver Lodge valley in 1933. The other fifteen are still resident, mostly engaged in agriculture. Harry Cranston joined the colony in 1911 but sold out and left after his house was destroyed by a fire.

The law among the early settlers was administered by M.S. White, a tall Swiss with an adventurous career and a great versatility, including the Swiss aptitude for language. He proved up what is now the Bagnall place but is at present living in Toronto. Across the highway from White were the family of Charles McNaught (a brother of Sam) who came in 1911 over the Edson Trail and filled a large place in the social life of the community.

Gradually settlement west of the river thickened up, spreading out to Halcourt, Rio Grande and Elmworth. At an early date there was an "apple belt" in the Beaver Lodge valley, Appleton school district being named after a settler named John Apple.

The writer has not yet in hand precise early records of Rio Grande neighborhood but the first settler in the Elmworth neighborhood was a picturesque character named Richard Courtland Hartington, a handsome young man who responded cheerfully to the appellation "Diamond Dick." He seems to have arrived about 1913 or 1914 and took cattle to feed, homesteading S.W. 17-70-11-W.6th now occupied by Jim Grant.

According to his own tales of exploits in many times and many places, he was figured by one of his neighbors to be 120 years old.

The story is that he once undertook to act as guide to a party with a pack train. Not feeling equipped for the contract he got an old packer to spend a whole night with him showing him how to throw a diamond hitch and to divers others things pertinent to the profession. Thus schooled he blossomed into a guide. He proved up and left in 1917 and at last accounts was farming a small place back in Old Ontario.

About the next settler south of the river was Geo. Dumback, who came from the United States and settled opposite Kenny's. Boone Taylor was for a time squatted on a school section but did not file. Followed the McDonald Bros., W.J. Oakfor, Geo. Grant, G.S. Moyer and Geo. Beggs in 1915. Grant and Moyer commenced farming in the district. Quite a few flocked in in 1916, among them F.T. Brewer, who became the first post master. The first school was held in Diamond Dick's shack and the first teacher was Miss Small, now Mrs. G.S. Moyer, who was picked by Mr. Brewer from among a number of applicants because of her alert interest in his proposition.

The first settler in what is now the Hythe neighborhood seems to have been Geo. J. ("Kelly") Sunderman, whose father was one of the first homesteaders in a neighborhood south east of Camrose. During the winter of 1909-10 Sunderman came to the Grande Prairie district by way of Athabasca, Grouard and Sturgeon Lake, filing along the Beaver Lodge

on S.W. 13-73-11. He was followed by Al Hopkins and Geo. S. Odell, the latter filing on the land which became the townsite of Hythe. After these were Charles Robertson, C. C. Henderson, H.H. Hartley and F.C. ("Happy") Fletcher, these last not necessarily in order of mention.

Fletcher was a general handyman in the British Navy who was through the Boxer rebellion in China and after homesteading in Alberta with his cousins Owen Gulshan and Richard Jones came to the Peace in the summer of 1911, locating a S.A. Script beside Odell. The district was called "Happy Valley" after him.

It would probably be duplicating other accounts in this special edition to enter further into details regarding land occupation but mention should be made of Jack Sutherland who came to the Peace to prospect for mineral and timber in 1905, at which time the Grand Trunk Pacific was supposed to be going through the country. Packing his way in to the mountains by way of Athabasca, Slave and Sturgeon Lakes, his first trip cost eleven hundred dollars. He came to settle on August 15, 1909, and is still living with wife and family on the land first homesteaded, S.W. 18-72-7-W. 6th. Mention must also be made of Henry Roberts and family, who first came up in 1908 and settled south of Bear Lake in 1909, of the Trelle's and Smith's and Thompson's and many other notable families whose stories will appear in due course.

Hermit Lake was named after a tall, eccentric old fellow whose real name was Calkin (no relation to "Doc" Calkin, of

Rycroft). Just north of Hermit Lake on a quarter now owned by Fred Roberts heerected a little coop of a place and tried to dig up some ground with a spade in order to hold the land. As he walked away from Mead and Grant's one day with a bundle over his back and a blanket trailing on the ground Grant remarked that he looked like a hermit. The nickname stuck and the lake was called after it. The police afterwards deported him.

It is of interest to note that in 1908 Henry Patterson the Dean's, Jim Cory, a man named Clark and Bob Beeman helped Monkman hay. The mower went out as far as Halcourt to Jim Cory's.

Even at the risk of duplicating other records mention must be made of Bob Cochrane, who inaugurated the commercial production of grass seed on the prairie and was at one time thought to be the largest producer of timothy seed in the British Empire. It all began with the seeding in 1912 of ten pounds of timothy seed which had cost ten dollars.

This particular section has been intended to cover agriculture, with settlement touched only incidentally except in the case of the Beaver Lodge district, where a general review of the early influx was commissioned.